



Jim Broadway

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## Illinois School News Service

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### Republicans balk at keeping adequacy promise

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

"If you make the investment [in public education], our economy will prosper," Ralph Martire told the House Appropriation Committee for PK-12 Education. Martire, Executive Director of the [Center for Tax and Budget Accountability](#), explained the implications of a study correlating school funding to economic health.

The concept is ROI - return on investment - Martire said. The states that have for years invested significantly in education have higher per capita incomes among their citizens, lower unemployment rates, more governmental resources to pay for the programs and services their citizens expect - including quality education.

The differences are significant, he said, not just marginal. In all categories of economic well-being, the improvements stimulated by investment in schools are "more than double [the level of] statistically meaningful." The benefits of school funding go far beyond merely having citizens more prepared for college and careers.

Martire said a 1-point cut in the dropout rate "will increase wages [and] save taxpayers money from reduced social costs, welfare costs, correctional costs, healthcare costs, et cetera, by over \$13 million a year. You get a return on investment when you ... fund evidence-based practices" that are shown to help children learn.

**The committee also heard from other [school funding advocates](#)** on Wednesday, from individual educational leaders and statewide association representatives, urging that the General Assembly maintain at least the \$350 million-per year pace of increased school funding, to achieve the "adequacy for all" promise by 2027.

The threat to that pace is the fact that the evidence-based school funding reform law enacted last year includes a provision for a \$50 million allocation for property tax relief in communities where the property tax is very high, \$10 or more per \$100 EAV, with relatively low levels of school resources as a result.

The tension seems to be about the \$50 million. School funding advocates want at least the \$350 million per year (which, as ISNS has reported, is woefully insufficient to achieve the goal set forth in the statute, that even the least affluent school will have sufficient revenue to "adequately" by 2027). Opponents to that position, Republican legislators mostly, believe the property tax relief should be counted as education funding.

**Rep. Steven Reick** (R-Woodstock) recalled that the new school funding bill "included the \$50 million. ... So basically now you're kind of sliding in here saying, 'Well, we want to take that fifty and move it over to an additional appropriation of 400, instead of the 350 the bill provides for. Is that what you're saying?'"

**Martire responded that the \$350 million** applied to the current school year "is having a dramatic impact, and we want to continue to have that impact." Reick kept pulling back. "If we invested \$7.2 billion in one year we would have a remarkable return on investment, but the bill says what the bill says, right?"

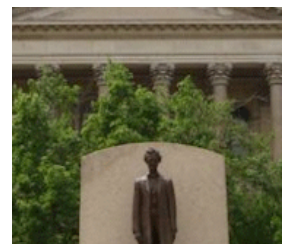
Reick correctly pointed out that, per the new law, residents in districts that have total revenues exceeding 110% of their "adequacy targets" may petition for a referendum to reduce property taxes for schools, but that is unlikely to happen for the vast majority of school districts in the state.

As the Advance Illinois "[Equity Dashboard](#)" makes clear, of the 852 school districts in Illinois, 701 are underfunded in relation to their adequacy targets. Those underfunded districts enroll more than 1.7 million students. Schools with many Black, Latino, English learners and high poverty students are most underfunded.

The massive "[Fund the Formula](#)" coalition - representing statewide associations and citizens' organizations, including Advance Illinois and the CTBA - posted a clear definition of the current legislative problem this week: Does the state stay with the \$350 million for "education," or does it pull back by \$50 million?

**Schools throughout Illinois still need to be connected** to the Internet, the committee also learned. To address the issue, **Rep. Natalie Phelps Finnie** (D-Harrisburg) presented [HB 5750](#), a bill to appropriate \$16.3 million from revenue that an ISBE staffer said as been "sitting" in the School Infrastructure Fund for that purpose.

ISBE determined the extent of the need through its interaction with "[Education Superhighway](#)," an organization that has done surveys of schools' Internet connectedness in Illinois and other states. The non-profit organization found schools in [94 of Illinois' 102 counties](#) need to establish or improve fiber linkages.



Coincidentally, the number 102 also reflects the number of districts that still do not have fiber networks, the survey data revealed, and another 84 districts need "bandwidth upgrades." And 282 districts reported "insufficient Wi-Fi" when they were contacted for the survey. Schools lacking high-speed Internet access would be the highest priority recipients of the grants, according to the [details of the appropriation bill](#).

Reick was dismissive of the bill, which is being expedited because it enables Illinois to receive a \$3 million federal match. Districts have had plenty of time to develop Internet links without state or federal assistance, Reick said. "Why give them the money?" He and Rep. Jeanne Ives (R-Wheaton) voted "no."

**As we suspected would happen**, the House and Senate do not intend to work nonstop until the May 31 adjournment deadline. Instead, they will take the entire weekend off, maybe enjoy some of the [excellent events that are scheduled](#) throughout the state. They'll roll up their sleeves Monday, so they say.

They did get a good bit done this week. I'll post a chart on the pending School Code bills over the weekend (check the homepage of [illinoisschoolnews.com](http://illinoisschoolnews.com) (if the server's up) by Sunday if you're interested. Otherwise, spend some time outdoors on this sunny weekend and enjoy the holiday - Jim

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